

Africa's Development Challenges

21 September, Athens: Conference co-organised by ELIAMEP, the African Embassies and the British Embassy in Athens

The Conference focused on the challenges confronting the African countries and the scope of long-term development co-operation.

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Euripides Stylianidis called for an international alliance against poverty in Africa. It was stressed that the size of the financial aid is not sufficient in itself for the continent's development; the quality of the development programmes is equally relevant. In this, economic co-operation and the contribution of civil society and the business sector is crucial.

The Ambassador of South Africa to Greece, Mr Jannie Momberg, reminded that Africa's problems affect all, and that capacity-building and leadership are significant to transform the continent. Equally significant is the need for African states to assume their responsibilities and demonstrate initiative.

Expectations for the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) - an innovative framework to face the challenges of poverty, corruption, poor governance, pandemics, and to coordinate the various aid efforts taking place in Africa — were set high and a better integration of NEPAD into national development programmes was called for. Mr Momberg appeared optimistic with the first reactions on behalf of some African countries and noted that for the first time, there exists a common rallying point between African states and industrialised countries.

Mr. Popo Oyenwole, Executive Director of the Centre for African Policy and Peace Strategy, London, welcomed the fact that since 2004 poverty and underdevelopment in Sub-Saharan Africa have come to the international spotlight in an unprecedented manner. The Gleneagles Summit and the UN Summit have provided a historical opportunity to raise world consciousness about the extent and oppressive nature of poverty in Africa – a continent trapped in a 'vicious circle of poverty and disease' made worse by inherent corruption and poor governance. In spite of the progress that has been accomplished in the democratisation of some African states in the 1990s, he argued that we remain still far off track for the Millenium Goals in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The discussion continued with Dr Thanos Dokos, ELIAMEP's Director of Studies who noted that Africa's problems have long been neglected. Nonetheless, globalisation pressures no longer permit the indifference of the international community to continued civil wars, organised crime and state failure, environmental degradation and forced or other migrations due to poverty, pandemics and civil strife. It is thus important to contain, manage and resolve Africa's challenges. African states were called to take the lead, and the EU to use its 'soft power', economic assistance, in co-operation with the Union of African States, NATO and other institutions.

The closing debate touched on gender equality, consistency in EU policies towards the ACP states, the involvement of the IMF and the World Bank and a range of mediation initiatives for conflict resolution on the continent.

Special note:

The newly established Hellenic - African Chamber of Commerce has been set up to promote economic relations between Greece and the countries of the African continent.